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JARDINE ANSWERS PROTEST AGAINST KODIAK-BEAR PROTECTION

Shows that Regulations Will Permit Practically All that
Kodiak Petitioners Ask and at Same Time Will
Preserve a Unique Wild-Life Species

In line with the definite policy of the Department of Agriculture on predatory-animal control, which, while designed to safeguard farming and stock-raising, is opposed to the extermination of any of the interesting species of the wild life of the continent, Secretary of Agriculture Jardine, in response to a lengthy petition presented through Congressional Delegate Dan Sutherland early in February, has explained their rights in the matter to residents of the Kodiak-Afognak Islands group of southern Alaska. The petitioners cited the growing agricultural activities of these islands and the losses connected therewith, particularly of stock raisers, through the depredations of the big brown Kodiak bear. This giant of the wild they consider the most vicious and dangerous of the carnivorous animals of Alaska. They asked that all protection be removed from the Kodiak bears, so as to permit all persons to kill them in any manner at any time of the year.

The present regulations allow an open season on large brown and grizzly bears from September 1 to June 20, with the proviso that these bears may be taken at any time when about to attack or molest persons or property, or when encountered within half a mile of a human habitation. The Secretary

in replying to the petition called attention to this fact, and he stated further that the Alaska Game Commission, after a careful study of the whole situation, had recommended a modification of the regulation that would doubtless accomplish all that the stock raisers and others ask. The new regulation, which is receiving favorable consideration, would give protection to these big bears as game animals as formerly, but with the further proviso that on Kodiak, Afognak, Raspberry, Spruce, and Sitkalidak Islands any resident engaged in agricultural pursuits may kill such animals when they are considered a menace to persons, livestock, or property.

The Secretary calls attention to the wider latitude thus afforded in control, and expresses his confidence that when ranchers on the islands learn of the proposed action, they will find they have sufficient leeway in necessary control measures against stock-killing bears. He also mentions the fact that preserving this species in the nonagricultural mountain areas of the interior will serve to perpetuate what is known to scientists, sportsmen, and visitors to Alaska to be the largest carnivorous land mammal in existence.

The statement was cited of Paul G. Redington, Chief of the Biological Survey, who spent some time in the region in 1928, and of sportsmen who have come in contact with the species, that these giant bears do not relish the presence of man, and when unmolested rarely attack human beings. Their food consists for the most part of berries, alder roots, grasses, and other vegetation, with some fish, and while individuals may develop stock-killing propensities, they are not as a species inimical to

agriculturists. The Secretary states that the new regulation should be in effect by July 1, and expresses his conviction that the petitioners will thus obtain practically all they are asking for.

If the department should remove all protection from this notable species and thus open the way to its eventual extermination, there would be a heavy fire of justifiable criticism not only from the many organizations and individuals who have in the past derived both sport and pleasure from their contacts with the Kodiak bears, but from the people of Alaska as a whole, for the big-game animals of Alaska attract to the Territory many people from the States and other countries and their expenditures for equipment, travel, personal services, etc., constitute what is by no means an inconsiderable contribution to the commerce of the Territory.

The Secretary assured the petitioners through Delegate Sutherland that the Alaska Game Commission and the Office of Experiment Stations of the department will keep in very close touch with the situation to note the needs on the islands in question.

His letter, dated February 11, 1929, is as follows:

Hon. Dan Sutherland,

House of Representatives.

Dear Mr. Sutherland:

Your letter of February 4, inclosing a petition from residents of Kodiak and adjoining islands in Alaska, is received.

The Department recognizes that in settled regions individuals of any species of bear at times are inimical to livestock. While in general in the United States and in the Territory of Alaska bears are being more and more considered as game animals and given protection, it is conceded that game administrators must be given some leeway to permit the taking of bears where the record is clear that individuals have become habitual killers of livestock. This situation has been recognized as it applies to Alaska, and I am quoting for your information a regulation of the Alaska Game Commission, which is now in force in connection with the Alaska brown and grizzly bears:

"Open Seasons on Certain Game Animals

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"Bear (large brown and grizzly).---September 1 to June 20; provided, that any person may kill a large brown or grizzly bear at any time when such animal is about to attack or molest persons or property, or when found within half a mile of a residence or human habitation."

I have learned from Mr. Paul G. Redington, Chief of the Biological Survey, who spent three months in Alaska last year and three weeks on Kodiak Island, that the brown bears on Kodiak have at times destroyed sheep and cattle belonging to ranchmen. This situation is well understood by the members of the Alaska Game Commission and at the annual meeting of the Commission held in Juneau last November it received a great deal of consideration, and representatives of the stockmen of Kodiak Island were present to put their case before the Commission. As a result, the Commission decided to recommend to me an amendment of the regulation cited above that will, when put into operation, give further relief to the ranchmen on the islands affected by the depredations of brown bears. The proposed amendment is as follows:

"Bear (large brown and grizzly).---September 1 to June 20; provided, that any person may kill a large brown or grizzly bear at any time when such animal is about to attack or molest persons or property, or when found within one mile of a residence or human habitation; provided further, that on Kodiak, Afognak, Raspberry, Spruce, and Sitkalidak Islands a resident engaged in agricultural pursuits may kill a large brown or grizzly bear at any time or place when such animal is considered a menace to persons, livestock, or property."

I am sure you will reach the conclusion after studying this amended regulation that the latitude given to persons whose lives or property are threatened by Kodiak bears is very wide in respect to the control possibilities, and I am also confident that the ranchers on the islands, when they become cognizant of

the action proposed to be taken in this matter, will have no doubt that much leeway is given them to control stock-killing bears.

To what extent livestock may eventually occupy Kodiak, Afognak, and adjacent islands is problematical. Mr. Redington tells me that there are many areas on Kodiak Island which he visited where the terrain is of such a character as to make it unavailable, in his opinion, for crop production or for the ranging of livestock, and he feels sure that such areas as are to be found adjacent to Uganik and Uyak Bays may well continue as a satisfactory habitat for the brown bears. These areas, and some others, including the high mountains of the interior, are comparatively far distant from those portions of the island now used for agricultural purposes.

As you are probably aware, the Kodiak bear is the largest carnivorous land mammal in existence and has for many years been well known to scientists, to sportsmen, and to the dwellers in the Territory in which it roams. According to the testimony of many scientists and sportsmen who have come in contact with this species, it is clear that the bear does not relish the presence of man, and there are only a few authenticated cases where unmolested bears of this species have attacked human beings. The bear lives largely on the vegetable products of the country in which it ranges, consuming alder roots, grasses, berries, etc. When the salmon commence to run up the streams the bear varies its vegetable diet with fish, and it is not believed that this bear, because of its fear of man and because of its feeding habits, is as a species inimical to agriculturists. Individuals, however, may develop stock-killing propensities, and in order to give local people the authority to protect themselves against the renegades of the species, the Alaska Game Commission has had in operation a regulation that conveys this authority; and through the amended regulation, which should be in effect by July 1, further latitude will be given them in connection with control measures.

I am convinced, therefore, that the petitioners will obtain practically what they are asking for, and I think you will agree with me that the Department can not go much further than it has in adjusting this situation. Were the Department to agree that all protection should be taken from this notable species and thus perhaps open the way to eventual extermination, I feel sure that it would be subjected to a heavy fire of justifiable criticism from the people of Alaska as a whole and from many organizations and individuals who have in the past derived sport and pleasure through their contacts with the Alaska brown bears. The big game animals of the Territory attract many people from the States and other countries, and the local expenditures which these people make for equipment, travel, etc., I am informed constitute a by no means inconsiderable amount in the commerce of the Territory.

I am requesting the Alaska Game Commission and the Office of Experiment Stations to keep in very close touch with the situation on the islands in question.

Sincerely yours,


Secretary.